

NSC BRIEFING

13 April 1959

FRANCE AND TUNISIA

1. The French National Assembly has been recalled for a 15 April emergency debate on the cabinet's acceptance of US-UK good offices mission proposals as a basis for negotiations with Tunisia. This still leaves Premier Gaillard vulnerable to rightist pressure for taking the Algerian frontier issue to the UN Security Council.
- A. Tunisian president Bourguiba, of course, would welcome such a move since he could exploit it to internationalize the Algerian situation.
- B. Gaillard's increasingly precarious political position may force him to accept the rightists' demands that he turn to the UN Security Council.
- C. He may be encouraged in such a move by the British ambassador's 11 April assurances that London would support Paris on the question of establishment of a neutral supervisory organization on both sides of the Algerian Tunisian frontier, and would also support France on the Algerian question.
- D. Rightist cabinet members and probably ^{also} the Foreign Minister Pineau seem to be ignoring warnings that the UN atmosphere is hostile to France. They apparently feel that France has a strong case on the frontier issue.
- E. The French Assembly has a propensity for rallying to nationalistic positions and will be conscious of public complaints that the cabinet decision was taken under "considerable pressure from Washington."

- II. Gaillard has left himself a possible channel for diverting some rightist pressure away from immediate resort to the UN by stating that the government preserves the right to take the frontier problems before "international organizations."
- A. A hint that France might move immediately to raise the "Tunisian question" in a special meeting of the North Atlantic Council was put forth on 11 April.
- III. Domestic political considerations will act as a partial brake on overzealous nationalists.
- A. All parties want to avoid having a government crisis during the cantonal elections on 20 and 27 April.
1. These are expected to indicate significant trends along which future party policies will be shaped.
- B. The Socialist party is slowly evolving towards dissociation from tough nationalistic North African policies. Even though Socialists can be as nationalistic as anyone in a pinch, they will probably act as an additional brake on Gaillard.
- IV. Although a government crisis this month therefore seems unlikely, the net effect of current developments will be to increase the likelihood of a crisis as soon as the elections are over.